

Can reading authentic texts improve EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge?

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Introduction

A number of studies in first and second/foreign language acquisition have confirmed the widespread belief that reading can contribute to vocabulary growth. Most researchers agree that incidental learning from reading is a slow and gradual process and that it is difficult to predict which words will be learned. On the other hand, research has demonstrated that the number of words that can be covered by explicit learning can only be a few hundreds a year (Nagy et al., 1987). Moreover, explicit instruction cannot provide acquisition of all aspects of word knowledge because some aspects can be acquired more efficiently by continuous exposure to the words in different contexts. This study is a follow-up of another study on vocabulary acquisition, but it has a different design. Its aim is to find out if the previous findings would be replicated with another group of participants.

Research questions

1. How much vocabulary can EFL learners acquire from reading and reading-while-listening to an authentic text?
2. Does vocabulary size affect the rate of vocabulary acquisition?
3. What is the relationship between the word frequency in the text and the learning gains?

Method

Participants in this study were 51 first-year English major students in Macedonia, divided in three groups: reading-only, reading-while-listening, and a control group. The text used in the study was the first eight chapters of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The participants were tested on the knowledge of 51 words which appeared between two and ten times in the text. In order to establish the vocabulary size of the participants in the study, Nation's (1990) Vocabulary Levels Test was used. The pretest-posttest used for this study was designed in the same way